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Richard Pathidge

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METROPOLITAN WORKHOUSES

AND

THEIR INMATES.

“The Poor-house, which is justly made distasteful to the able-bodied vagrant, should present a different aspect to those who are driven thither by no fault of their own; and the grievance we have to complain of is one which, for the sake of all concerned, should be remedied without delay.”

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METROPOLITAN WORKHOUSES,

ETC.

THE following letters were contributed to a weekly newspaper, and it has been suggested that they might be made more widely useful by being reprinted in a separate form. At the time a former pamphlet was written on this subject, there was but little hope that it would excite much interest, or that persons would stop to look into a question which seemed only to affect the lowest classes of our fellow-creatures; the lowest, it was often said, not only because of their poverty, but from their moral degradation, which placed them beyond the pale of our consideration and sympathy.* Since that time, however, there has been a great advance in the opinions and interest, if

* I think few persons realise the fact, that the number of inmates of Workhouses amounts to about 600,000; no inconsiderable portion of our poorer fellow-creatures.

not of the public, of *many* persons, and all the words which have been spoken upon this subject do not seem to have been in vain. We are beginning to see that it is one worthy of our attention and care; and not only is the condition of the inmates of our Workhouses continually spoken of, but it has even been thought sufficiently important to occupy the attention of Parliament, the subject having been brought before the House of Commons by Lord Raynham on the 25th of June.* Had it not been so late in the Session, there is little doubt that it would have excited very considerable interest, but, under these circumstances, the consideration of the subject was postponed till the next Session.

There were but two amongst the speakers who did not agree in the necessity of an inquiry into the subject, and some from their own personal experience spoke of the harshness with which the law is administered.

And whilst I write this, I see another proof of the progress this cause is making. A proposal has just been made (originating, it

* See Appendix, p. 66.

is said, “in a thoughtful and womanly suggestion of the Lady Mayoress”) to the Guardians of the West London Union, for “the adoption of the services of a committee of ladies to co-operate with the Guardians in the task of visiting the female wards of the Workhouse. It has been thought that healthy and improving influences might be wrought upon the younger female paupers by a word in due season of advice and encouragement from persons of their own sex, freed from the character of official monition; whilst with aged females the voice of sympathy from the lips of women, their superiors in station and education, might oftentimes shed a ray of sunshine or of hope over an otherwise weary path.” When I ventured, some years ago, to make a suggestion to the Poor Law Board (having tried in vain to influence a Board of Guardians), that they should at least give a recommendation that the visits of ladies, under due regulation and supervision, should be allowed and encouraged, I suppose I was thought to be making a very wild and visionary proposal, and for the time the attempt came to nothing. I think it marks

an era in public opinion (for which we may well be grateful when we look back for a few years), that not only has such a proposal as I have just quoted been made, but actually carried out and acted upon for a year and a half in one of our largest London Workhouses. And not only this, but the suggestion has even been made in the House of Commons by the noble Lord whose motion I have just referred to, that women should exercise their influence in the management of these institutions, hitherto entirely entrusted to men, with the exception of one paid matron, for we cannot consider the staff of pauper nurses to represent the womanly influence that is essential to the due carrying out of every work connected with the poor. When ladies' committees have been so generally and for so long a time entrusted with a share in the management of many of our charitable institutions, I do not know why it should have been thought so strange a proposal that they might possibly introduce some element of good, some softening sympathy, even some powerful influence, over the various classes which are brought under definite control and management

in our Workhouses. I have before mentioned that such a plan has been adopted in the Workhouses of Holland for more than a century. I should not have supposed that the Dutch women are better educated, or have a larger share of common sense and judgment than our own countrywomen, and yet their influence has been found beneficial and most necessary there, and I think we can hardly doubt the benefits that would arise from the adoption of such a plan here. The reason why it has not been adopted I imagine to be the same which prompts the rejection of most suggestions for the softening and amelioration of the system, viz., that it is intended to be a harsh machinery, and such an influence would make it otherwise.

It is said that the inmates of our Workhouses are but the dregs and refuse of the population, and they are only one degree raised above the prison class. This is not the fact, as every one will say who has personally made acquaintance with them ; but supposing it *were* true, there is then the more need of efficient superintendence and discipline, and it is a strong argument

against leaving such persons either to themselves or to the care and influence of persons of their own class. Even the decent poor who may be inmates, and who would willingly submit to the authority of their superiors, are entirely unfit themselves to be rulers, which they must be, when entrusted with power over wards of sick and helpless sufferers. But it is said they only carry out the rules of the House, framed either by the Poor Law Board or the Guardians. Rules are ineffectual for such a work, and cannot influence the *motives* and *conduct* of those who perform these duties. They cannot supply a knowledge of them, if no previous training has been given, or create religious feeling, tenderness, and sympathy, which are all necessary to a right fulfilment of such offices.

Surely the inmates of our Workhouses are at any rate not more degraded than those who have already fallen into crime, for whom such great efforts are now being made, and for whom better treatment and more numerous and efficient superintendents are provided. If influence is thought to be powerful and effective

in awakening good feelings in the hearts of criminals, surely it might be so amongst those who, however degraded, have not yet overstepped the boundary of crime. A magistrate of great experience has lately told me how desirable he felt the influence of women would be, indeed is, in a great measure, in our prisons; and how thankful he should be to obtain their services, not only for the occasional visiting of the prisoners, and reading to them, but for a more continual influence, having access to them at all times, in their hours of punishment as well as in their quiet hours of work. He has told me how a few kind words have drawn tears from the eyes of prisoners, especially of the boys, and, when asked why they cried, they have answered, "Because no one ever spoke kindly to us before."

I feel a difficulty in touching upon the subject of out-door relief, for this part of the system is surrounded by perplexities which the wisest can hardly hope to overcome. The chairman of a Board of Guardians told me the task was indeed a distressing one, and that we should have but little sympathy or compassion

left if we were constantly witnessing the scenes he described, and the class by whom relief is demanded. If the law allows of no discrimination in the bestowal of relief, the case is certainly a difficult one, for there is little doubt that many of those who apply for it spend it in idleness and sin. For such a state of things I have now no suggestion to offer, for to bestow charity, whether public or private, on those who beg for it because they will not work, is only increasing instead of lessening an evil, and if it *must* be done it is a sad necessity. But *all* who receive out-door relief are not of this class; and to stand for hours waiting for it, and receive it at last, as is often the case, with hard words and abuse, is a trial which *many* of the decent and reduced poor, especially widows, have to undergo. If such is the disheartening truth with regard to out-door relief, one would think that the more kindness and liberality should be shown to those cases which can be proved to be deserving, and which only ask for temporary relief; yet all appear to be treated alike. A story was told in the House of Commons, the other night, of a respectable poor woman whose

husband went as a soldier to the Crimea, and temporary help was asked for herself and children during his absence. This, however, could not be obtained till after a length of time, and with the greatest difficulty. I myself heard of a case where the husband was struck down with fever, leaving the wife and children destitute whilst he was in a hospital. She might have gone into the Union, but could get no relief to maintain her family during this temporary affliction, although the case was known to the clergyman of the district, and the relief demanded was only for a time. Why persons should be encouraged to go into the House, rather than helped to keep out of it, I cannot imagine, as when once a home, however humble, is broken up, there can be but little hope of regaining it. But the struggle is maintained to the last before this is done. A poor elderly woman in ill-health, and unable to earn a living, has lived during the greater part of last winter upon the parish allowance of one shilling a week and a loaf, which she made to last through the week, because she would not give up the hope of better times; and when the

summer came she was able to earn a scanty living, by having kept together her humble home.

On the other hand, an unwillingness to admit into the Workhouse those who apply for shelter is a cause of great evil, and a constant source of crime, as the following statement will show, told me by one of our Middlesex magistrates:—A poor destitute woman often applies for admission at the Workhouse gate; for two or three nights she is refused. She then asks for shelter at the station-house, but is told she cannot be admitted there till she has committed an offence against the law. So the policeman waits whilst she goes away and breaks a pane of glass, which act gives her admission to the station-house, and a shelter for the night. Thence she is taken to the magistrate, and committed to prison, perhaps for two months, for which she is grateful, saying she only wishes it had been for a longer time, for it is no punishment to her. The treatment is better than in the Workhouse, and less to be dreaded than a home in the streets.

So persons are driven and encouraged to

crime, and induced to prefer the Prison to the Workhouse.* It was stated in the House of Commons that persons are frequently refused admission by the porter at the Workhouse gate, who can have no right to exercise authority in the matter, and it is therefore illegal. Sometimes persons are rejected from the lateness of the hour. It has been well suggested that Workhouses should open their doors at all hours of the day and night to applicants, for it is often at night that there is the greatest need of assistance for cases of destitution. It is a rule of the Poor Law that "cases of emergency" should be admitted at all times, but I suppose the porter is often the only judge as to the "emergency."

When an inquiry into the management of Metropolitan Workhouses was asked for in the House of Commons, it was answered that it was not necessary, for power already existed in the Poor Law Board to correct any abuses or grievances that might be brought before it. But it is impossible that this could prove a sufficient remedy for the evils complained of.

* See Appendix, p. 70.

The two points which have been dwelt upon by all who have considered the subject and been practically acquainted with it, are, the necessity of a higher class of Guardians to give orders, and a higher class of officials to carry them out. It is said that the poor have a right to the relief that they receive through the Poor Law, and therefore we cannot and ought not to look for gratitude for it. I do not see the truth of this statement, and cannot agree in the necessity of its practical consequences. If the gift itself has a hard character, as coming from an unknown and collective body, whether the nation or the parish, and therefore cannot be the same as if bestowed by an individual, I think there is the more need to soften it as much as possible in the practical administration of it, rather than render it a still more ungracious gift by the medium through which it is conveyed. For instance, the relief afforded by the Bureaux de Bien-faisance in France is derived from the gifts of benefactors personally unknown to the poor, but whose contributions are placed in one common treasury. So again with their hospitals

and many charitable institutions, which are partly supported by a public tax paid to the Government. I cannot believe that the poor who benefit by these various forms of charity stop to consider through what channels it comes to them, or are more ungrateful for it than those who receive our private charity. Relief from suffering is what they feel the need of, and I believe it is the *immediate personal intercourse* of the poor with those who afford this relief, whether as donors or almoners, that affects their general estimation of its character. Were they treated with the respect that is due to every human being, whatever his condition or degree, we should not have to complain of ill-feeling instead of gratitude for the gift.

It has been objected to the proposal that clergymen should act as Guardians, because, it is said, they should not take part in the distribution of temporal relief to the poor. I cannot see the force of this objection, for it is impossible so to divide temporal and spiritual matters that the two shall be kept entirely separate. I do not think we can make such

distinctions in our intercourse with our poorer brethren, either as clergymen or district visitors. The desire of the clergyman of a parish must be to raise the temporal, moral, and spiritual condition of the poor, to countenance and assist the deserving; and if this cannot be equally the aim of the Guardians, his knowledge and recommendation of the more decent inhabitants of the parish would, at any rate, be very valuable.

If clergymen and medical men and magistrates, who really know the characters of the poor, from personal intercourse with them (which the Guardians of many of the Unions in London do not have), there would be an impression on the minds of the poor that justice was administered to them in the distribution of relief. Generally speaking, the lower class of shop-keepers (there may be honourable exceptions amongst them) have not the time or opportunity for intercourse with the poor, and, when acting as Guardians, the only aspect under which they see them is as applicants for relief, which must be administered as sparingly as possible. In undertaking this trust we cannot

attribute any motive to many of them but that of keeping down the rates to as low a point as possible. This is no doubt a right wish in itself, for I know that these rates do press very heavily on the class just above the poor; but economy ought to be made consistent with justice and humanity, and if kindness and a desire to distribute the means in their hands as justly and liberally as possible, do not mingle with this other motive (at present the chief and ruling one), we cannot wonder that the poor, who have a keen sense of justice, rebel against and murmur at the system.

I have before suggested that words of Scripture might be placed upon the walls of some of the wards, and this would be but one of the results (apparently trifling perhaps) which might arise from the introduction of what has been called the "feminine and religious element" into our Workhouses. At present the only words for the edification of the inmates are the rules of the Poor Law Board, framed and hung up in the dining-halls, nurseries for women and children, &c. These relate only to the "punishments for disorderly and re-

fractory paupers," various forms of offence being stated in detail. Judging from them, I suppose that "obscene and profane language," "playing at cards, climbing over fences and boundary walls," violence, and insubordination of every kind, is expected, at least in these departments of the House. Laws are of course necessary for the enforcement of order everywhere, and it is well to have it known that Guardians and Masters have the power of punishment in their hands. But it seems to me that such an enumeration of the lowest and most degrading kind of offences, continually set before the eyes of any class of persons, must have a hardening effect, must appeal to the worst parts in the nature of every one, and teach them that such conduct is to be expected in such a place. If iniquity *is* in reality the law of the "body of the House," and of these wards where women and young children congregate (though I may add that I have seen some amongst them who appeared to be decent wives and widows, reduced to this temporary asylum through affliction), then let us look more carefully into the matter, and see *who* it

is that furnishes this apparently hopeless class of persons, who defy, it is said, all efforts for their restoration, and who can only be appealed to through the lowest motive,—that of fear. Statistics have proved that the greater portion of them come from *pauper parents* and from *pauper schools*. Surely this latter fact is worthy of our deepest consideration, and is of the utmost consequence with regard to the present as well as the future. The children are in our power; to guard them from contamination, to cultivate kindly and healthy affections, to train them in some useful work, and to provide them with some better and more hopeful provision on leaving the schools than the lowest and hardest service,—these are some of the points which should engage the attention of the wisest and highest minds. The attempt to train a higher class of schoolmasters for Workhouse schools has failed for the present, for the time was not yet come; the places and the circumstances were not prepared for them, and Guardians did not desire them; but the effort was a noble one, and it may have taught us how to do the work more practically and effectually. It may have taught

us that there must be more than one schoolmaster and schoolmistress needed to cultivate the affections and the hearts of those who have no family ties of love to train them ; and those teachers who will best supply this want will do their work more efficiently than those who, themselves highly and intellectually trained, make that the first consideration in the training of their scholars. On looking back to the report of the Kneller Hall Training School, I find that the evils of the Workhouse school system are dwelt upon, and there is a recommendation of "the system of segregation, as applied in the separate families of the Reformatory School at Mettray, the strength of pauperism, no less than of crime, lying in early associations." Let every effort be made, then, to arrest the evil at its source, if we feel it to be so unconquerable afterwards. Even if, during the time that the children are in the schools, they are kept as much as possible apart from the elder inmates, at the age of 14 or 15, if not immediately provided with situations, they are introduced into the body of the House, to mix with all those who may chance to be inmates. On this point,

and on the occupation of these girls, a clergyman who was for many years Chaplain to a London Workhouse, writes as follows :—“ The subject is most important, but surrounded with difficulties. On two points, however, I am clear : 1. The employment, or rather non-employment, of adult Workhouse inmates, which leads to so much mischief and has been the fruitful source of all disorder in this class. 2. And far worse, the iniquity of introducing pauper children indiscriminately into Workhouse schools, and so totally corrupting the morals of the children and making all hopes of improvement desperate ; or, when that is not the case, the herding of children with the adult inmates, however vicious and worthless those inmates are.”

In conclusion, I will give the following description of what a Workhouse is intended to be, in the words of one who admits the “ great inherent difficulties of making it such an establishment as to afford at once a comfortable asylum for the aged and infirm, a place of efficient education for the young, a test for the idle and profligate, a refuge for the

vagrant, a hospital for the sick, and a place of safe custody for the idiotic and lunatic. All these purposes have to be regarded in a large Workhouse establishment, and they are not very easily made compatible." Not very easily, certainly, but rather with the utmost difficulty. Only by the most earnest devotion, and by the combination of men and women working together for the same object, can we hope to carry out such an undertaking. I think a more difficult work could hardly have been sketched out, each portion and branch of it requiring persons to conduct it who have been trained to such occupation, and are prepared to undertake it in a true spirit and with a high motive. And yet this is the work that is entrusted to such persons as have been described in many of the following pages. Those who read them will be able to judge if they are likely to be equal to the government of such an Institution as is described above, and if it is therefore unreasonable to ask that another influence should be admitted and recognised. Hitherto it has been rejected from a vague fear of possible mischief (against which must be weighed the *positive* evils of the pre-

sent state of things), and I cannot but think also from a feeling that there is much going on that will not bear inspection, or the daylight of justice and benevolence to be thrown upon it. But I cannot despair. After the experience of the last few years, and the numberless encouragements that have been granted to workers in this cause, it would be wrong to do so. Rather let us believe that "things are working together for good—for lasting, future good, out of present evil. It is no proof that progress is not being made, because we do not see it. One sows and another reaps; but the sower shall no more miss his recompense than the reaper, if only he does his work diligently and faithfully. He may have to do that work amid nipping winds and beneath a sullen sky. No ray of sunshine may warm him, no blade may he see springing from the furrows. But he knows in whom he has believed, and that He is able to keep that which is committed to Him unto that day, when they that have sown and they that have reaped shall rejoice together, each in the receipt of his own wages, each having gathered fruit unto life eternal."

LETTER I.

HOMES FOR THE DISABLED POOR.

The suggestion contained in your recent article on this subject is an admirable one; and, having been already carried out in a few instances, we may hope that private benevolence will interest itself still further in the cause of the disabled poor. But your allusion to our Union Workhouses leads me to make a few remarks, which I hope may find a place in your paper, as the subject seems to me one of vast importance. You say, "the poor-laws undertake the care of infirmity, widowhood, and old age." This is indeed the fact, and surely six millions a year devoted to such a purpose should be sufficient to provide for the comfort of those who need relief. Then comes the question, why should not the refuge afforded be a suitable place of abode? Most persons confess that it is not, but few trouble themselves to think *why* it is not, or how it might become so. The subject has lately been brought more than once before the public, and the result will be, I trust, of benefit. After some practical knowledge and experience of the matter, I may venture to express my conviction that there is no reason why these Workhouses should not become suitable refuges for those for whom you plead, and for whom they are, in the first instance, intended, and not for the vicious and able-bodied. The objection to them at present is not a want of liberality, or the quality of the relief provided, but I say confidently it is the mode of administering it, and the treatment the poor receive from the officials who are in power. Were the feelings of the poor considered, the relief they receive would not be complained of; and this might be effected if the management of such institutions were placed in the hands of a superior class of persons. As long as aged and incompetent pauper nurses are set

to rule over wards of sick and infirm inmates, we need not wonder at hearing complaints of the treatment received, the one matron placed at the head being utterly incompetent to superintend the numbers under her care; the work demanded of her being, generally speaking, far beyond what any one person can perform. A tone and influence introduced into our Workhouses, such as would be exercised by a superior class of women, trained to the care of the sick and aged, would render these abodes such as they ought to be for our disabled poor, and the prejudice against them would soon disappear. Such suggestions are not new; but I trust that, by frequent repetition, they may be impressed on the public mind, and ultimately be adopted. You are, perhaps, aware that a first step in this direction has been made by the appointment of lady visitors in the St. Pancras Workhouse, where many excellent reforms are being carried out, and the plan has hitherto been most successful. Christian love and sympathy will go far to reconcile the sick and aged to the loss of home and friends; and with a more careful classification there can be no need for the decent and afflicted poor to associate with the worthless; and this might surely be effected by judgment and discrimination. Private charity may still benefit the few, especially those not utterly destitute; but it cannot provide for the thousands who must receive it through the Poor-law system. To amend the management of our Workhouses is, therefore, the only efficient measure, and I can see no reason why they should not be made institutions suitable for the poor of a great Christian land. The machinery is all ready; let it only be worked in a manner that will ensure the respect and gratitude of those we seek to benefit. The day of improvement has come for our hospitals; let us hope that the time is not far distant when we may say the same of our Workhouses, and they, too, may benefit by the pious labours of Christian women.

Jan. 14.

LETTER II.

WORKHOUSES.

Until very lately but little thought was bestowed upon the subject of Workhouses, even by those who in many ways felt for the sorrows and sufferings of the poor. This indifference may, perhaps, be traced to some of our national peculiarities. We disapprove of anything like sentimentality in connection with charity, and prefer to see it administered with a coarse roughness rather than with any feeling approaching to the other extreme.* Besides, with all our national benevolence, we have a horror of being imposed upon, especially by the professed beggar or pauper, who is supposed to live on private or public charity. No doubt there is truth in this; but it has often struck us that there is a certain confusion also, which leads to much mischief practically, and to some perplexity in those who wish to think and act wisely in these matters. This confusion arises mainly from a vague suspicion floating in our minds that there *ought* to be no paupers. And here let us observe that this word has become an unfortunate one, bearing a signification quite different from its literal sense, that of a "poor person, or one who receives alms." We have attached to it a meaning of reproach and scorn from which we cannot divest it, and which to many persons is a justification of the treatment which the so-called paupers

* No doubt the present state of things is a reaction from the discovery of the grievous mischief and abuses that were encouraged by the old Poor-Law. There is still a very prevalent feeling that by kindness to the pauper we shall encourage pauperism.

receive. The generality of persons pay their poor-rates not with a feeling that they are contributing part of their substance to the just support of the distressed, the sick and afflicted, but to the maintenance of a class who, somehow or other, ought not to exist, ought not to be a burden upon the industrious and working part of the community. This belief will be hardly confirmed by those who have a knowledge of the facts and a personal acquaintance with the inmates of our Workhouses. But these places have, for the most part, been out of sight and out of mind, inaccessible, or difficult of access, to those who felt any curiosity about them. They were deemed the receptacles of the idle and able-bodied, who might find work if they would; everybody agreed that more efforts ought to be made by the poor to support the aged of their own families: and the impression has been general that the relief given was at any rate more than ought to be required, and consequently it was—and, indeed, still is—grudgingly bestowed. Now, can we clear our minds as to this doubt, and satisfy ourselves that what we give *must* be given, and *is* well bestowed? It has often struck us as strange that the many who pay poor-rates have not more curiosity to learn how they are spent, and what good the money really did to the recipients of it. As little was thought of this as the actual state of our Workhouses. But of late curiosity *has* been aroused, and, in a manner, satisfied. The attention of those who never thought about such subjects has been arrested by disclosures which we might have thought extracted from the records of some foreign prison rather than the true tale of a Christian institution in the heart of London in the nineteenth century, and professedly governed by a body of respectable Englishmen. Since these disclosures were made we have heard that persons who had been in that particular Workhouse had spoken of the state of things existing there, but were not be-

lieved ; such tales, it was said, could not be true, and they were set down as impostors. There is little doubt now as to the truth of their revelations. An interest unknown before, and not likely soon to pass away, has been awakened in the subject. Our care now must be to watch this interest, to guide it in a right direction, to guard it from degenerating into a hurtful sentimentality, from rushing into an opposite extreme, which is the danger of all reactions. For surely there *is* such a thing as a wise and discreet kindness and discipline, as far removed from such dangers as from the coarse and often brutal harshness which has been thought to be the necessary mode of treating our poor. To deny that such institutions as we are speaking of are liable to abuse, and are often abused, as the resort of the idle, the vicious, the hopelessly hardened, would be vain as well as untrue ; but even for these we ask some different treatment from that which they too often receive at the hands of the officials who have to deal with them. Are not the worst, the most degraded, made still lower, still more degraded, by the example of those they see set in places of authority ? Would not even such as they are be impressed, at least as to outward behaviour, by a quiet, calm, and dignified treatment ? The language and manners of one of these lower officials was thus described the other day by a poor woman waiting for admission to see a sick relation in the infirmary. “ We were all spoken to,” she said, “ like dogs, in language not fit for Christian tongues to utter, or Christian ears to hear.” And this we believe, from testimony gathered from many quarters, to be the general mode of treatment and reception by those who practically have the rule in such places—treatment which cannot fail to call forth the worst language and passions in return.

The truth is, dislike it as we may, that our Work-houses are not in the first instance to be considered as

receptacles for the able-bodied and vicious, but as the recognised and authorised refuges for old age and sickness, and as such they are entitled to our respect and humane consideration. The utmost prudence and caution cannot avert the evils which compel the poor to look to others for support in sickness and old age. In the crowded dwellings of our London poor especially a family cannot take upon itself the care of the infirm members belonging to it ; and besides these there is a large class who are entirely without friends and relations, depending upon their own health and strength for subsistence. The misfortunes which lead many in the classes above the poor to look for help to those societies which are established for the relief of all ranks and professions, compel the friendless poor to enter the Workhouse and obtain relief there. Why should we consider it a sin in the one class more than the other, or reply that they ought to have averted their misfortunes by prudence and foresight ? Yet it has often been objected to all suggestions for the more humane management of Workhouses, that the inmates are there through their own fault, and do not deserve better treatment than they receive. Till we divest ourselves of this idea, we shall do nothing towards improvement. There are numerous cases in the sick and infirm wards of every Workhouse which deserve as much kindness and consideration as those in our Hospitals, who for the time are equally dependent on charity.

Then comes the question—How is this improvement in the management of our Workhouses to be obtained ? We must be content to progress slowly in this as in all other good causes, and advance towards our object step by step. There seems to be a growing conviction that more inspection and an influence of a higher kind is necessary, but a great obstacle in the way hitherto has been the necessity of reducing the expenditure as much

as possible. The first thing that strikes a stranger, especially one who has seen anything of the management of charitable institutions abroad, is the vast amount of work demanded of those who are placed in the position of master and matron. Is it possible that they, especially the latter, can perform all that is required? In many of our large London Unions it is impossible. To visit, at least once a day, each ward, is, according to the rules, one of the duties expected of the matron; and where, as in most cases, there is no one in authority between her and the pauper nurses, we can well believe that it is a most important duty. Besides this, she is to exercise control over every department of the vast establishment; to superintend, and even perform, the cutting out of the clothing; to give out the needlework, to inspect the laundry, the kitchen, the infirmary, and the work-rooms where the able-bodied are employed; besides keeping the accounts, a portion of which also comes to her share. We need not wonder if the work is often ill-performed, and the mind and temper distracted by the various claims upon her time—if the linen looks as if it had never entered the wash-tub, and some of the wards remain unvisited week after week. The mere inspection must be impossible, to say nothing of any moral influence which she ought to exercise over those under her care. In any similar foreign institution, where the help afforded would be voluntary, and therefore not so sparingly bestowed, there would be one in authority placed over all, but under her, at least one over each department, to enforce order, to maintain discipline, and see that the work was properly performed. What sort of government is exercised by those who at present rule over their respective departments may be understood by such as have had any practical experience of it, or had the opportunity of seeing the behaviour of pauper nurses and instructors in the absence of any superior or controlling power. We all know how easy is the abuse of power, even with persons who have some self-control, some guiding prin-

ciple of religion ; what, then, must it be in the hands of those who at present wield it almost universally throughout our Workhouses? To select the best and most efficient of the inmates for active employment, and to make it a privilege and object of desire, is a wise and judicious plan, and, under *sufficient control*, it may be found to work well ; otherwise, it must produce the results we should expect—tyranny and harshness on the one side, an absence of all comfort and respect on the other. It is not so much the material part of the system that is complained of and dreaded by those who are obliged to submit to it, as the association of the more deserving and respectable with the worthless (arising from a want of due classification), the vile language, the coarseness and harshness of officials ; the absence of sympathy and comfort for the mind is felt more than the loss of liberty and of home. The occasional visits of the Matron are frequently causes of terror rather than comfort, and the weekly visit of the Chaplain is, in many cases, looked to as the one point of consolation.

Let it not be thought that these are imaginary or exaggerated pictures. They can be verified by many who have been, and are, continually eye and ear-witnesses of such things. Visitors to the men's wards have spoken of the looks of longing for sympathy and comfort that have followed their steps from those who see nothing of either in the nurses, whether male or female, who are set over them. We have all heard how the language of oaths and curses was silenced in the hospitals of the East by the presence of those for whom the rough soldiers felt reverence and gratitude, and why should it not be so here? Why should not a similar tone and influence be extended over others as wild and reckless? And if it is repeated, as it has been already, hundreds of times, that all this would make our Workhouses "too comfortable," let us say at once we believe such a fear to be entirely groundless. It is not the principle of indiscriminate charity that is advocated ; but, on the contrary, the enforcement

of a far stricter discipline over many departments of our parish relief, especially that afforded to the out-door poor. We would here repeat a suggestion that has been made before, as to the practicability of district visitors being in some way brought into connection with the parish authorities. Surely their evidence as to the state of the families they visit would be worth having, and less liable to abuse than the present plan. We have known the more respectable and reduced poor speak with dread of the visits of the parish officers, who have often little consideration for the feelings of such people. "It hurt me very much to be spoken to in such an insulting manner," has been the remark frequently made. In too many cases it is the begging and the drunken poor who obtain relief. And if the law of the land demands the admittance of all who seek it, there should be no encouragement for those to enter who could possibly gain a living outside. The enforcement of order and obedience would more effectually deter the wild and reckless from entering than the greatest licence of speech or conduct. And, as to the more deserving, there is no fear that the spirit of independence and love of liberty, so strong in our English poor, will ever allow them to take to this refuge, unless as a last resort. The present system of management has not hitherto deterred them from availing themselves of it when compelled to do so; neither would a mode of treatment conducted with discriminating judgment, justice, and dignity, encourage them to quit their homes, either in sickness or old age, any more than for the shelter of a hospital. In most foreign cities there are hospitals for the incurably sick and destitute; in London there is but one, our Work-houses taking their place. Where else, then, are our incurable poor to go? Here they must lie down and die, after longer or shorter illnesses; it may be, after years of wasting suffering. It is for the sake of these that we ask for a better execution of the Poor-Law system; for

a spirit and an influence which no machinery consisting of one paid Matron and a staff of untrained pauper Nurses can ever supply. A respectable inmate of an infirm ward was asked lately what she thought of the permission which had been given to ladies, in one of our large London Workhouses, to visit the wards. She said :— “It is just what I have been saying here ; how different would be our situation if we had lady Guardians as well as gentlemen ! We could speak of many little matters so much better to them ;” and she expressed a hope that the plan would soon be adopted elsewhere.* The poor woman who made this remark was not aware that her suggestion had been carried out as long ago as the last century in the Workhouses of Holland, where the system had been admired by Howard. Visit the dull

* Of course it was always supposed that one object of the weekly visits of the Guardians was to hear anything that the poor themselves might have to speak of, as they are entirely in the power of the Nurses. But even this privilege has, in some instances, been taken away, and on the walls of every room is placed a printed notice, stating that in future all complaints must be made in writing to the Master, and by him presented to the Guardians, entered in a book, and investigated. This may look like a desire to enter into the wants of sick and aged sufferers, but everything depends upon the character of the Master, and if he is such as I believe many in this position are, unfit for it by disposition and education, we may imagine how many formal complaints ever reach the Guardians’ ears ! Of course the real effect of such an order must be to stop all mouths, and enforce a silent endurance of all grievances, and this merely because the official visitors will not be troubled with listening to them. Trifles no doubt they may appear to them, but to the inmates perhaps matters of life and death.

and cheerless wards occupied by sick and aged men, and you will find that they have seen no one during many months but the Doctor and Chaplain, besides the one querulous and drinking old nurse. Can we not imagine what would be the value of even a visitor here, to read and speak words of comfort and consolation to those who were so sorely afflicted and forlorn? The daily presence of ladies in the wards could not but have a most beneficial effect on the minds and conduct both of patients and attendants; the former could no longer be considered as shut out from all interest and sympathy, and the Nurses could not feel that they might act with impunity, because their behaviour would never be known beyond the walls of the house. We cherish an earnest hope that the success this plan has already met with in one instance may lead to its adoption in many others, and that this may be only the first step in a long course of improvement.

Jan. 21.

LETTER III.

You will, perhaps, allow me to make a few remarks in reply to the question asked last week by "A Guardian of the Poor." The inquiry is a hopeful one, for it has been thought hitherto that those persons who have the authority in our Workhouses were generally, if not universally, opposed to any innovations, which were all supposed necessarily to interfere with their arrangements and encroach upon their power. I am not aware that the plan of having lady visitors has been *organised* in any Workhouse in London except that of St. Pancras, where it has been working for a year.* Single visitors

* In the Report of the Directors for the past year, especial mention is made of the services of the Ladies'

may be, and are, frequently admitted, as permission can generally be obtained to visit any particular inmate; but if any good is to be done it must be through the means of numbers combining in the work and acting under authority. Single efforts here and there amongst seven hundred or eight hundred persons must be almost useless. I believe the St. Pancras Committee of Ladies numbers at present about fifteen members, all residing in the parish; one has been chosen to preside over the rest at their meetings. Each lady has a separate department, and chooses that for which she feels herself to be best fitted, so that one does not interfere with the work of another. The plan is under the sanction of the directors, who have consulted the ladies as to various points of management, especially in the infirmary and in the work-room. And it is this point which it seems to me so desirable to press upon the attention of all who think of the subject. There must be the *entire co-operation* of the Directors or Guardians with the ladies, and, if this is to be effected, the former must divest themselves of the vague notion of *interference*, which at present seems to haunt them. Why should not all be supposed to be working for the same end, viz., the wise and humane and judicious management of a difficult but most important concern? I repeat here that there are many matters of arrangement (even if minor ones, most materially affecting the comfort and

Committee, which are gratefully acknowledged, and the ladies on their part made the following remarks: "They are anxious to express their unanimous opinion of the great improvement which has taken place in the Work-house under the arrangement of the present Board of Directors, and the satisfaction they feel in the conviction that all that may be now wanting has but to be pointed out to be remedied; and they would at the same time offer their best thanks for the ready attention which has been paid to all their suggestions."

order of the house) which can only be suggested and looked into by women. Poor-law Commissioners and Guardians of the poor, whether of the upper or middle classes, cannot, and ought not to be expected to legislate wisely upon such matters. Sensible women who have been accustomed to visit amongst the poor, and can judge of their habits and feelings, should be consulted, and work in harmony with the Guardians. Otherwise what is the result? Laws, vexatious and unnecessary, are made, only to be connived at and broken. One of these I cannot help mentioning. Some, but not by any means all, of the poor old and sick people are provided with boxes, or lockers, to keep a few little articles in—the scanty treasures saved, perhaps, from the wreck of home, and dwelt upon with the more affection from their scarceness. Amongst these was often a cup and saucer, or a teapot, and as tea is allowed to be given to the inmates in all cases, and made at all times of the day, I have never yet been able to discover the wisdom of the law which forbids *any* crockery to be taken into the house. An instance of its harsh execution came before me the other day. An old woman, upwards of eighty, had a treasured teapot of seventeen years, the only remembrance of her once comfortable home; it was taken, and broken in pieces before her eyes. The story was told with tears and indignation, and heard with feelings of sorrow and vexation; who could wonder that the consequence is often concealment and deceit, and the feeling in the minds of the poor, irritation instead of gratitude towards their benefactors? I think women, who were in the habit of personal intercourse with the inmates, would hardly have agreed to the passing of such a law as this. It may be difficult enough to enforce any system of laws for a class of persons who have lived all their lives in independence and freedom, but the more care should be taken to frame only such as are absolutely necessary to order and discipline, and do not press harshly upon the feelings of the poor. If such a

committee as now exists had formerly had an inspection of the large workhouse of St. Pancras (utterly beyond the management of one matron, the only woman in authority), it is impossible that abuses could have gone on for years, such as were brought to light last year.

Lady visitors may be tolerated by the guardians, in some instances, for the sake of the moral and spiritual benefit of the inmates, where no cooperation would be thought of: even this would be a great gain, but to make the plan as complete as it might be, and a means of real benefit, there should be unity and confidence between the two parties, upon temporal as well as spiritual matters. The subject is gaining ground in the interest of the public. By a notice in Parliament the other night, there is to be a discussion on the administration of the law in workhouses. Parliament may do something in the matter, but public opinion will do more, and in time reach those who have the real power in their hands — the Guardians of the poor. The recent returns show a decrease in the numbers receiving relief from the Poor Law ; if, by emigration for the able-bodied, we could be relieved of this portion of our dependent poor, our task would be comparatively easy. We should then have to deal only, or chiefly, with the sick and aged, and there could be no difference of opinion as to the treatment which such should receive at our hands — such as are known in other countries, not as “paupers,” but as “God’s poor.”

The only other instance I know of any organised plan of visiting was in a country Union in Sussex, where it was most successfully carried on for some time. The behaviour of the inmates was materially improved, and the ladies had every reason to be satisfied with the results of their labours. I could mention numberless instances in which reading aloud to the blind and infirm would be a work of mercy which would be most thankfully received, and can only be performed by ladies.

Feb. 20.

LETTER IV.

CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS IN PARIS.

As you have kindly received some observations of mine upon the state of our English Workhouses, I am induced to send you a few notes I have made during a recent visit to Paris, upon some of the Charitable Institutions, the practical management of which is admirable and worthy of imitation. As this management seems to me to be totally independent of whatever is erroneous in the opinions and doctrines of the people, I shall make no apology for praising what I saw that was excellent in these institutions. I wished especially to visit those which correspond in any degree to our Workhouses, but, of course, as there is no Poor Law in France, there are no establishments exactly like them. Those which most resemble them are the "Hospices," and of these I visited the two principal, that "des incurables Hommes," and "des incurables Femmes," containing respectively 500 and 800 inmates. They are principally supported by the "Administration," which has the management of hospitals and charitable institutions. But they may, perhaps, be most exactly compared to our alms-houses, on a large scale; many of the beds are *lits de fondation*, that is, founded by individuals who have the right (which remains in the family) of admitting an inmate. This prevents indiscriminate admission, of course, and ensures the reception of a more respectable class of persons. And, generally speaking, there is always the power of selection in the Minister who presides over this department. I could not find that there was any refuge for such as, alas! too frequently come to our Workhouses—the idle and the able-bodied. In Paris old age and sickness seem to be the sole passports to admission into an asylum. Both of these institutions are managed by the Sœurs de St. Vincent de Paule; in one

there are twenty, in the other forty. Of the superiority of these gentle, dignified-looking women over our "pauper nurses *," I need hardly speak. Whatever disagreeable office they have to perform is done with patience, for "the love of God," and from a deep, religious feeling of the sanctity of their calling; their patients obey and respect them from a reverence for this calling. And so would Protestant nurses be respected

* I may repeat here what has been before stated as to pauper nurses, viz., that of 500 in London Workhouses, one-half are above fifty, one-quarter above sixty, many not less than seventy, and some more than eighty. I know an instance of one between seventy and eighty having the care of a small ward of imbecile old women, and those who had fits. I do not see how we can expect to find really competent persons amongst the inmates; hardly any would be there who were not either morally or physically incapable of gaining a living otherwise. Paid nurses are permitted by the Poor Law rules, which I do not think are to blame for this and many other evils. It is in the *carrying of them out* that these mainly consist, and this depends entirely on the persons employed. Is not this one chief cause of the sad fact, obvious to every one, that persons come out of a Workhouse contaminated and deteriorated?

I do not see that we *can* reasonably expect these women to perform the arduous duties required of them, in return for food and shelter merely. The voluntary devotion to such work has not yet anywhere in England penetrated to the lower classes, and we cannot look for it in the *lowest*; we cannot look for that spirit which would enable them to work all day, and often a good deal at night also, as they say, "for nothing," especially if they are themselves infirm and disabled. One after another has spoken of it to me as a hardship, saying "what do we get for it all?" Of course *the* motive and *the* reward have never entered their heads or hearts.

if they fulfilled their vocation with the same feeling of its being from God, and the most blessed that human beings can be called upon to exercise. The chief outward difference that I noticed was that all the beds were furnished with curtains, which seem to be considered indispensable both here and in the hospitals I visited. I suppose the expense of washing is a reason against their adoption in London; but the advantages of them, according to the opinion of the Sœurs who were in attendance, seem to be great, and would obviate one of the chief objections of our poor to hospitals, viz., their publicity. I should hardly have expected to find the point of decency so strongly dwelt upon there. Many of the *lits de fondation* were superior to the rest; there were, perhaps, only four beds in one room, and there were more articles of furniture allowed, arranged with that appearance of good taste which is perceptible in all the apartments of France, even the humblest. Some of these inmates have a small allowance of money per month, but the generality are chosen from the entirely poor and destitute; a few were young or middle-aged, but the chief number were incapacitated from old age and infirmity. There is more freedom allowed than in our Workhouses. Those who are able may go out daily, and visitors are also allowed daily. The director, a most respectable-looking and civil man, in a kind of military or official uniform, showed us over the whole. About twenty or thirty were in the workshops, tailoring, carpentering, &c. There were gardens and courts between the buildings, affording ample space for air and exercise. The food is every day the same, except on "jours maigres;" but soup is the general article, with wine and rice-milk for supper; neither tea nor coffee are ever given in these establishments, and they seemed amazed at my thinking of such luxuries here. A larger cupboard is afforded than with us, either one between two, or one to each person.

It struck me as being a great advantage over our

Workhouses, that there the attention was not distracted by the variety of classes and divisions that we meet with here, all of which seem to require a different superintendent and management, and yet are combined under one head. There the sick and the aged were the sole care of the attendants. The question arose in my mind whether it is a wise and merciful law that requires those to be admitted into an asylum who could by any possibility maintain themselves out of it. I cannot but think that if there are such persons, they should be assisted to emigrate, and in no case kept here, unless physically incapable of maintaining themselves. I cannot find that idle and vicious persons are received into any of the institutions of Paris, unless with the *view of reformation*, no attempt at which is made in our Workhouses; yet such persons are brought together here, and the evil of their intercourse spreads unchecked. If such cannot be excluded, I would again draw attention to the absolute necessity of their entire separation from the decent poor. As long as they are permitted to be even under the same roof, the idea of degradation, if not contamination, must be attached to our Workhouses. But I must pass on to some other institutions of much interest. One of these, it seemed to me, we might attempt in London with advantage, as we have at present nothing of the kind. It is called a "Maison Municipale de Santé," and it is for the reception of a superior class of invalids, who are able to pay for their support, in sums varying from three to six francs a day; it includes the class of servants, as well as ladies and gentlemen of moderate means. Our institution for sick ladies is on the same plan, but I should think to men such a home would be even more acceptable than to women; surely there must be many solitary dwellers in lodgings who, in times of sickness, would be glad to find nursing and medical attendance provided, for a fixed sum, especially if *good nurses* were provided. Many of such houses, I was told, exist in Paris (twenty or more), but these are

not supported by the Administration, and the charge is much higher. The plan, therefore, is found to answer well. The highest charge is for single apartments, the lowest for those which contain many beds. Some of the inmates remain even for two or three years in long cases of sickness. For such persons without families we offer no help.* This principal house was founded in 1802; it is not tended by *religieuses*, but by trained nurses. There is a garden and chapel belonging to it.

The most gigantic establishment for the poor in Paris is the Salpêtrière, or Hospice de la Vieillesse, containing above 5,000 inmates. Aged persons who have resided one year in the Department of the Seine are admitted. Of this number 1,200 or 1,300 are lunatics. It is a most singular spot; the different buildings cover an immense extent of ground, and they are divided by gardens and streets. There are no Sisters here, but “*Surveillantes*,” who are called Mademoiselle; the one who conducted us over a great part of the establishment had been at her work forty years, and had been trained by Sisters; but I did not think the general appearance of neatness and cleanliness equal to what I saw in the institutions conducted by them; they are paid wages, but at a very low rate. The washers were standing in tubs round a large tank, beating the linen with boards. About seventy idiot children were being taught in schoolrooms by a very intelligent young woman, but whose untidy appearance proved the advantage of a neat and uniform costume.

To all visitors to Paris who are at all interested in such matters, I would recommend a visit to the beautiful Hôpital Lariboissière, close to the Northern Railway-

* Could we not set apart a ward in one of our spacious new hospitals for those who could afford to pay something, and would gladly do so to ensure the good attendance and nursing which is now to be had in some of them

station, formerly Hôpital de la République, but which changed its name in consequence of a noble bequest from a rich lady, whose name it was henceforth to bear. For size, space, cleanliness, and beauty of arrangement, both within and without, I do not think it can be surpassed ; it has gardens, corridors for the invalids to walk in, with open terraces on the top, and a richly-decorated chapel, containing a monument in marble to its noble benefactress. Its polished floors and snow-white beds made it look a most enviable retreat for sickness. It contains 612 beds ; eighteen Sisters have charge of the sick, one in each ward, with servants, both men and women, under them. In none of the institutions that I saw was there anything analogous to the plan we have lately begun in our hospitals with such good success, of employing the services of ladies to superintend nurses ; I cannot believe that any of those I saw in authority were of that class ; they had all the appearance of women of the middling or even lower classes. The secret of *their* requiring no supervision is, I imagine, their having received an efficient training for their work, and the *religious feeling* with which they execute it, looking for no reward and no benefits in this world. I repeatedly asked if all the Sœurs were of equal rank, and was always assured that it was so, the Superior only being of higher position and rank ; their work is divided in the kitchen, laundry, and *lingerie*, but all perform offices of this kind. Nothing can surpass the beautiful order of some of these spacious store-rooms for linen.*

* One feature in the hospitals I visited, different from anything I saw at home, I think worthy of notice. In each was a large room, for the concoction or decoction of "Tisanes," drinks made from a great variety of herbs, the name of each of which was written on the vessel in which it was made. Our guide told us that great importance was attached to these remedies, and that he himself was always cured by these simple means. It can

I cannot finish these notes without noticing the noble Hospital for Sick Children, or "*Enfans de Jésus*," as it is called, with its six hundred inmates. I wish that English travellers would visit it, that we might be induced to emulate it and raise our present small institution of thirty beds to one suited to the needs of our population. The classification and management appeared to me admirable, and much is done for the moral as well as the physical benefit of the children, both here and in the convalescent houses attached to it. It is situated nearly in the suburbs, and the spaciousness of the buildings and gardens surrounding them render it a most favourable locality. As a supplement to this grand institution I must mention a smaller asylum established within a few years for "incurable children," and already containing eighty of these poor creatures, who are nursed and taught with the greatest tenderness by ten Sisters of the Order "Marie-Joseph."

Almost all were employed in needlework, and are able to receive instruction, though their cases are physically hopeless. This good work was founded by an individual, and began with no funds and in the humblest manner.

It is impossible to visit all these institutions without longing for services as devoted as those of the good Sisters, especially in the care of the young and the aged. Whether we shall ever attain to the gentleness and refinement of manner remarkable in them remains to be proved, for we have never made the experiment; but as it exists also in the truly Protestant Deaconesses of Germany, I cannot despair of success amongst ourselves. That we have *not* yet attained it, is, I think, plain. More

hardly be that all the first-rate medical men who attend these hospitals can be mistaken in their estimation of the properties of these herbs; and how great a recommendation would be their cheapness here amongst the heavy expenses of our hospitals and dispensaries!

than once during these visits a remark of one of our English hospital nurses, by no means a bad specimen of her class, came to my mind. I asked her one day if a certain doctor was still attending the hospital. "Oh, yes!" she replied; "I don't know what we should do without him to come sometimes and kick up a row; it helps to keep us alive, for it is dull enough here!" Yet this woman was not without a certain love for her work; but I think no one with a conviction of the sanctity of her calling could have uttered such a speech.

Let us bid God-speed to any attempt that is made to elevate the character of this important class, to impart to them that truly religious feeling which alone can give refinement of manner and devotion to their work. Let not every one who joins in such an attempt be met on the threshold with vague fears and accusations of imitating the errors of our neighbours. Let us boldly follow what is good in their practical works, and look at the results that follow from their means, in the firm belief in the purity and superiority of our faith, and that in that communion we have power to do all things; but confessing that in practice we fall far below the standard we might attain to.

I would also mention that I visited one of the "Bureaux de Bienfaisance," where everything corresponding to our out-door relief is distributed. They are managed entirely by the Sisters, who even attend to the work in the dispensaries attached to these institutions. What appears to me to sanctify their work, and redeem it from the degradation and harshness connected with *our* relief, is the religious feeling combined with it, and the object of *spiritual* and *moral* benefit being kept in view by those who have the distribution of this charity, which can hardly be said to be the case with our "officials" in this department. "Dames de Charité," corresponding to our district visitors (a work set on foot by St. Vincent de Paule in 1633), are numerous in every parish throughout Paris.

The public discussion upon Workhouses is set aside for the present; it may be that time will thus be given for a more mature consideration of the subject, and good will result from the delay. In conclusion, I may perhaps be allowed to say a few words in reference to your correspondent's recent letter on the Visitation of Workhouses. Even if the casual visits of ladies are permitted (a matter which I cannot think generally so easily arranged as your correspondent supposes), it can do little towards the amelioration of our system. *Organised* visiting and inspection may do more, but the *continual presence* of a higher class of persons can alone meet the whole extent of the need.

In a leading article upon Workhouses, in one of our principal journals a few weeks ago, I found the following remarks:—"We involuntarily rank the Workhouse next to the gaol; the juxta-position is not defensible, but however we may struggle against the connection, we cannot altogether undo it. Moreover, we cannot afford to do so. We must not, in justice to ourselves, and in justice to the poor too, raise the Workhouse altogether out of these lowering associations. *It is good for the poor themselves that they should be reluctant to take advantage of such a maintenance, and that they should connect a certain inferiority with it.*"

Now, I should like to mention that, from what I heard in the institutions in Paris which I have described, I do not believe that a better and more humane treatment of our poor *would* tend to pauperise them, and induce them to take refuge in these asylums, till they were compelled to do so. I was distinctly told that, notwithstanding the kindness shown to them, and the comparatively greater comforts that they receive, *there is always an unwillingness* to break up their homes and enter the Hospices. I think this confirms what I said before as to the unnecessary fear that, by making our Workhouses "too comfortable," we should invite persons to receive charity who did not need it. Certainly the

juxta-position of the Workhouse and the gaol is "*not* defensible," and the sooner we get rid of such a notion the better, by excluding those who do not deserve such an asylum, and reserving it for those who do, and who will never cease to do so, as long as sickness and poverty exist in our land.

With regard to families, I think that every effort should be made to prevent their breaking up their homes and entering the Workhouse, as the return from it must be a matter of difficulty, if not impossibility; any amount of out-door relief should be given *temporarily* to avert such a calamity, but with the solitary and aged poor the case is very different.

April 9.

LETTER V.

I hope I shall not weary the patience of your readers by again bringing forward this subject; but as it will shortly come before the public, when Lord Raynham's motion is proposed in Parliament, I cannot refrain from making a few more remarks, which I think will confirm what I have before said upon the subject. I believe the proposal will be for an inquiry into the administration of the law in Workhouses. I conclude this can only be made by an inspection, which it seems to me may be of great use, or entirely useless. An official inspection, such as is at present carried on periodically by the Poor Law Board, will do, and see little or nothing more than is done and seen by them now; for I do not suppose that there are any such horrors of management to be discovered as have recently been revealed in some of the institutions in Scotland, and which would be apparent to every one. The neatness and order of most of our London Workhouses would probably strike the visitor who should walk through the wards: of the real

mode of treatment of the inmates, and of their moral and spiritual state, little would be known by such means. I cannot but hope that if any inspection or inquiry is allowed, ladies may take a part in it. We have seen what has been done in Scotland in a similar work by a lady; and I am confident that there are many points which women alone can judge of and enter into. I think this point will be best understood if I simply give a few facts which I gathered at my last visit to a large Union Workhouse, and which are copied from notes I made immediately on my return home, that I might neither be tempted to over or under-state them. I may just say that I never encourage complaints, or extort them, but it is impossible to avoid listening to the stories of those who have been acquaintances for many years, and who have probably no other friend to speak to. Some weeks ago we discovered an old parishioner who had been for some time an inmate, and was now upwards of eighty; it seemed she had a son, whom she had lost sight of for twenty years, though she knew he was working in one of our great Government establishments: it was evident, therefore, that he could be traced by inquiry made at this department, but there being no friend outside to suggest or do anything in the matter, the old woman seemed quite helpless in it. A note sent to one of the authorities was immediately answered, giving the address of the young man, who had a good situation, but could only get leave to come up on Sunday. I must just mention that Sunday is a day on which no visiting is allowed at this Union, and this appears to me to be a very harsh law, for it is the only day when many of the poor can possibly visit their friends. To the really sick frequent visits are allowed, but not to the merely aged and infirm.* For them Sunday

* Visits to the aged and infirm are only allowed once in one month or five weeks, and in the intervals persons are refused admittance, from whatever distance they

must be a day of utter weariness, for nothing is read to them : the Chaplain has as much as he can do to perform two services in the room which serves as a chapel ; but there are many wards full of those who cannot possibly get there, and who pass the whole day with only the companionship of the nurses. I cannot but remark here how all this might be altered if there were in the House any persons of a superior class who would be capable of ministering to these poor creatures on Sundays, by reading to them and offering spiritual comfort. As it is at present, what interruption could be caused by the visits, at fixed hours in the afternoon, of friends and relations, it is hard to see. But to return from this digression to my story. Knowing it was not generally permitted, we asked and obtained leave for this young man to visit his mother on a Sunday ; the poor mother was full of anxious expectation, and could talk of nothing but the visit of her long-lost son. He came from a distance, but was refused admittance, though he told the circumstances, and he must have been seen to be a respectable man. The excuse made afterwards was that the “regular porter” was out. But what could have prevented referring the matter to the master and matron, even if the “official” could not have taken the responsibility upon himself to depart in such an *important* matter from routine ?—important, indeed, to no one in the house but the poor mother, as the end of my story will show. What I wish to prove is, that such an occurrence would not have taken place in any institution where a humane spirit ruled over and through the whole. The petty love of power turns the officials into tyrants, who have no thought or care for the feelings of those they rule over. Another day was fixed

may come. A great difference exists in these respects in London Unions, the arrangements depending entirely on the Guardians ; in some the rules are liberal and kind, in others extremely harsh and inconsiderate.

for the visit ; just before it arrived, I went again to the house, and the first thing I heard was that the old woman was dead. Every one in the ward was full of the subject ; they had rejoiced in the poor mother's happiness, and now truly mourned over her disappointment. A neighbour told me she said it would be her death, and she never ceased to fret over it. Her son was written to, but came too late to see his mother alive. Amidst the vexation and sorrow and indignation I could not help feeling, it cheered me to see the kindly interest expressed and the tears shed by many over this poor lone woman, whose sorrows were truly entered into by those who could give no relief but sympathy. Can we wonder that such a home as this should be called a prison ? But I must pass on to a few more results of this day's experience.

I found an old woman dead whom I had seen on my last visit. She was in the next bed to one whom I had known for years before she entered the Union. I asked about her death, and begged she would tell me the simple truth, not making things out worse than they were. She said her neighbour was dying for some time, and hardly spoke ; the last night the nurse got up once to look at her, but gave her nothing, and said nothing to her. We may suppose that nurses who have been employed in their arduous duties the whole day are not very willing to sit up all night with dying patients, so for this neglect we can hardly blame *them*. The old woman who was telling me of this is entirely helpless and bedridden, and can neither turn nor move herself without help ; so, as she is placed in the evening, she remains till the morning, often in the greatest pain and misery. Seeing the nurse close to her (the beds are not three feet apart), she asked her to be so kind as to turn her on the pillow, which the nurse refused to do, speaking crossly to her ; and she returned to bed. Yet this poor woman, out of the 6*d.* a week which is allowed her by a kind friend at whose shop she formerly worked, pays regularly 6*d.* a

month to this nurse, who would not do even such a slight office for her as this. What attention those receive who can pay nothing may be imagined. I said, "If the nurses think it such a disagreeable office, why do they remain here?" I was answered, "For the best of all reasons, because no one would give them employment out of doors; their habits of drinking prevent their getting any situation, or keeping it if they had it. One of them has pretty well gone the round of all the hospitals, and has now come here." So this seems to be the lowest occupation to which a woman can sink, the last grade of employment open to one who has lost all character and ability—that of taking care of our sick and aged poor! Another said to me, "It is like a prison; we are treated and searched like thieves when we have been out and come in again; it makes us dread to go out at all." Of course the fear is lest they should bring in forbidden articles and spirits; but can there be no way of guarding against this without hurting the feelings and exasperating all the more decent among them? Not as long as there is neither judgment, nor kindness, nor discrimination in the authorities—not as long as they render all respect impossible by going about their duties abusing and scolding their subjects, and breaking before their eyes every little treasured article of crockery they possess. One said to me, "It is well there are such places as Workhouses, but happy are those who never come near them! I trust I shall never die in this place; I have seen many deaths here, and I pray I may be able to get out first." She cried, and said it made her heart ache to see the deaths around her.*

* If there are any who read this who have stood by the death-beds of those they loved, let them think what the last hours of such as these must be; of the numbers who have no relations, no friend even, to be with them to soothe their last moments, to speak one word of com-

One woman had been allowed to go out to a hospital to have an operation performed upon her blind eyes ; there was no one to send her back, so at last some one had to fetch her from the Union. She said the language of abuse with which she was received by the master on her return she could not repeat ; she never heard such words. This woman had been in respectable service all her life, till blindness came on, and at the age of fifty she is consigned, probably for life, to the ward of this Union, without a person to read to her or endeavour to cheer her life of loneliness and darkness. Lord Shaftesbury may well have made the remark he did the other day at a meeting of the Society for Teaching the Blind to Read, and surely such a remark is noticeable from one who knows the poor and their habits and feelings as he does. Speaking of the 2,300 blind persons in London, Lord Shaftesbury remarked that "many had nothing to look forward to but the Union Workhouse, and God knew that for persons in such a condition it would be better to sit in the dirtiest corner of the dirtiest cellar than to go there." And yet, these persons are probably of the very same class which is admitted into our asylums and almshouses, and for whom generous efforts are made by the public. Why should not these persons receive the same treatment and comfort in one institution as another? I know it is still a prevailing feeling that we must endeavour to deter persons from entering the Workhouse, rather than allure them by holding out any prospect of comfort ; and I cannot forbear repeating what I have said before on this point, in the hope that we may ere

fort to the lonely spirit as it lingers on the borders of life and death. Oh ! let them think if *they* cannot do something for such sufferers as these, given up to the tender mercies of those who too often have no feeling, no sympathy, no reverence for the bodies or souls of those for whom Christ died !

long arrive at a truer state of feeling upon it. There are thousands who are sick and destitute through no fault of their own, and who have no resource but the Union. It is for these I plead. Let it be made as distasteful as possible to those who might work and will not (only let not even these be hardened and confirmed in their evil ways by the example and influence of those who are set over them), but let it be a home, not a prison, for those who have committed no offence against society, and who have perhaps spent their best years in labouring for its wants.

It has been urged that nothing will be done till we get a better class of persons to act as Guardians. In London we have many more difficulties in this respect than in the country. I hear of many country Unions where excellent magistrates are exerting themselves to influence the Boards of which they are always members to introduce reforms, to permit the visits of ladies, &c. Such an influence would do much for us here; but if gentlemen cannot or will not give up their time to the work, I do not see what hope there is for us. I cannot pretend to suggest how this part of the subject should be amended, but I know that at present all efforts for good may be frustrated by the opposition of the Guardians, and all suggestions obstinately rejected.* I earnestly trust that in the consideration of the subject that is approaching, as well as in the discussion of the equalisation of the poor-rates, in which many points relating to the management of the poor are incidentally brought forward, some attention will be paid to this very important branch of the subject. At present it stands in the way of all improvement.

I would also urge once more that some reformatory discipline introduced into our Workhouses would tend to lessen, rather than increase, the expenses of them. It is said that the worst cases in prisons amongst the women

* See Appendix, p. 61.

are found to come from Workhouses. Are these young creatures, from fifteen to twenty years of age, wholly irreclaimable? The Matron and the Chaplain, under the present system, say that they are, so they are only herded together (in many cases it is well if they *are* kept apart from contaminating the rest), and the only reformatory process used is, when any sudden outbreak, worse than usual, occurs (such as when, the other day, a poor schoolmistress was almost killed by the attack of these girls in one of our London Unions), they are sent off to prison, where, probably, they are better treated and cared for than in their usual home—the Workhouse.

I cannot say whether such occurrences as I have described are constantly going on in all our London Workhouses ; but I think we have no reason to suppose that this one forms an exception to all the rest. We know the same class of officials is to be found in all — a class which I do not hesitate to say is quite incompetent for the management of these most difficult of all institutions. I could add much more, but I think the result of *one* day's visit may suffice to show that we are asking no unreasonable request in bringing the subject of the "Management of Workhouses" before the Parliament and people of England, and demanding at least that the results of such management should be inquired into.

London, June 6.

APPENDIX.

THE following are some of the opinions of Clergymen, Magistrates, Members of Parliament, and others, which I have received, and which will not be without value, as confirming what has been said upon this subject, especially upon the two points connected with the Guardians, and the plan for Lady Visitors.

I.

“ I was Chairman of the Union at its first formation, and as several very large parishes, both urban and rural, are entertained within it, of course we had several large buildings under our control; and I prevailed upon the Guardians to have three establishments, one for the old, one for the children, one for the able-bodied, from the natural idea which must be apparent in every true mind, that each of these classes required very different treatment. I was obliged from multiplicity of business to vacate the chair of the Union at the expiration of three years; but not only during that time did the system work admirably, but it was continued for some time afterwards, until the Guardians,

finding that it would be more advantageous in a pecuniary sense to have all the poor together, determined upon building a new Union House; and thus were the incongruous materials again brought together.”

2.

The following suggestion seems to me to be very valuable, and especially worthy of attention:—

“I have watched with considerable interest the result of the labours of the Committee of Ladies appointed to visit St. Pancras Workhouse, which is doing its work with much of the quiet efficacy of a natural influence, and the reforms which have already been effected by the suggestions of the ladies on the one hand, and the good will of the Directors on the other, satisfy me that this is a legitimate mode of improving the condition of our Workhouses. I think the law as it at present stands is sufficiently powerful to enable Workhouse authorities to institute useful reforms, *provided proper men were elected to the management.* Hitherto it has been too much the custom among rate-payers of the upper classes to leave the election of vestrymen to the tradesmen and middle classes of the respective parishes, and to take no interest in the management of the Workhouse beyond a transient emotion of indignation excited now and then on the perusal of a newspaper report of some case of more than common hardship.

Whereas, if it were possible to induce every member of the community to take an active interest in the concerns of the poor, cases of hardship from neglect, &c. would scarcely be possible, because it would be the business of the rate-payers to vote the right men into the right places. At present the overseers and directors of the poor are often selected from the class of small tradesmen, who sometimes have an interest in contracts for supplying necessary articles to the Workhouse, or have some other kind of pecuniary interest in their office, but at any rate rarely show a strong desire to improve the condition of the poor committed to their charge.

“If men of station and influence in their respective parishes would meet together and draw up a list of candidates for the office of vestrymen, taking care that such list should include men of their own class sufficient in number to have their fair share of influence in the conduct of the board: moreover, if every lady and gentleman in the parish entitled to vote at the parish election would make it a point of duty to exercise his or her privilege, I cannot but think that the evils which we have to deplore in many of the metropolitan Workhouses would quickly disappear.”

3.

One of our Middlesex magistrates writes as follows: —

“ The want of classification in Workhouses and Unions is in my opinion one of the causes of crime. In this county some of the Workhouses are well arranged, and conducted with great care ; but, on the other hand, there are many which are in a sad state, and the inmates not only neglected but most improperly treated, especially the young.

“ I fear, until the *more educated classes* come forward and take more interest in the welfare of the poor, the inmates of Workhouses will not receive that attention to which they are entitled, and they will be subject to the evils of which you most justly complain.”

4.

“ I wish I saw my way about this workhouse question. Round me, old folks are never sent into the House if they can, or will, live respectably out of it ; and my parish has many in it, enjoying a sunny old age at home. It ought to be so everywhere. It may be so (in the country) if the Guardians choose. They have the power of allowing out-door relief to the aged, and the Commissioners (so I have always heard) prefer that they should do so. The workhouse in its mildest form is speedy

death to most old persons. ‘Fauces averni,’ never to be repassed. The true and only remedy at present is, for *gentlemen to become Guardians*. As the case stands, gentlemen, even those who are Guardians *ex officio*, dislike the work. They are afraid of the farmers, who bully them first lest they should be bullied themselves. If they or theirs have any political hope, they play into the farmers’ hands for the sake of their votes ; in most cases, therefore, the farmer is judge and jury over his own rates, — as unfair as a squire judging a poacher. The great hindrance to any improvement is this : that the New Poor Law, in spite of defects, works so exceedingly well, that people are content to leave it alone, and think it good enough, which it is not, though very good. One forward step was gained last year, in behalf of the medical officers. They cannot now, in the great majority of cases, be removed, save by the Commissioners themselves, in case of actual misconduct. I expect this to slowly revolutionise the condition of paupers. If I am right, we shall be able hereafter to ameliorate the Workhouses through the medical men. I am answering you coldly and cautiously, because I am answering you in earnest. Something ought to be done. One must sit long, patiently, and keep one’s temper, in order to see how and what the thing is, and can be carried out.

“C. KINGSLEY.”

5.

“ Long observation has satisfied me that there is no one field of real good in which Christian ladies of zeal and common sense can do more than in that offered in the Union Houses. I have never yet seen one of those Houses in which there was not a very large number of young females of lost character. They are cases, not for Chaplains only or chiefly, but for the educated, and by position elevated, of their own sex. There is a great cry for Penitentiaries. In these Houses already exist abundant materials to work on, for those who would reclaim this class of sinners. I think there is great error in the way many penitents of this class are treated ; they cannot be made religious all at once. Bring them into contact with those who will show pity for the woman, with shame at the sin, and they may be gained over to morality ; then let the same kindness point to high things, and they will listen. We expect and demand too much.

“ S. G. O.”

6.

The heads of our Church have given their sanction to the plan, and the following are the opinions of some eminent amongst them :—

“ Having for many years of my life been a visitor to an immense Workhouse, I can quite un-

derstand the truth of what has been stated.* I have seen the unruly class of young women in the Prisons of London by scores ; these unfortunates passed their lives between the Prison, the Workhouse, and the Hospital, no man caring for them, except in a few cases, and all uniting in punishing them. There is, however, one great improvement in the management of Workhouses, and it is this ; the children are removed from the contamination of the older inmates into district schools, and are taught trades and are fitted for active life.† In the early days of Unions the Workhouse child was the most pitiable object possible.”

7.

“I hope that the Pamphlet” (before alluded to) “will be so widely circulated as to lead other ladies to follow the beautiful example which you have set, and to ameliorate the case of those whom ‘age, ache, or penury’ force to seek a refuge which has few advantages to raise it above a prison. Such a refuge for the aged and decrepit ought to be a blessing, but human corruption finds there a field for every evil passion, and the blessing is turned into a curse, which only such kind interference as yours can mitigate.”

* In “Experiences of a Workhouse Visitor.”—*Nisbet*.

† This improvement, however, is far from being general, as it is not yet made compulsory, which will alone ensure the adoption of so desirable a measure.

8.

“I most heartily bid you God speed in your work of love. I think your Pamphlet quite right. Love must conquer, for it is of God, and He is the Almighty.”

9.

The following letter gives the experience of a lady in a distant county, which shows very forcibly how much good is checked by the prejudiced opposition of those in authority, who defeat their own interests by rejecting the help of a superior influence in Workhouses. It also proves the truth of what I have before said, that all suggestions for good may be frustrated by the Guardians and ignorant officials :—

“I have been a Workhouse visitor, and I took the deepest interest in the work, and I should have joyfully continued it, being most kindly supported by the Chairman of the Board of Guardians and some of the magistrates, but the Matron was a most passionate person and also of very intemperate habits, and she imagined that some of the aged women had complained to me of her conduct, and she therefore told the board that I gossiped with the old women! As I had refused to hear any complaint from them, I was able to refute the charge, and I was encouraged by the Chairman to

continue my visits ; but as I found I brought only trouble to the aged and sick, I discontinued them, until I was summoned to the poor Matron's dying bed, who, with many tears and truest sorrow, wished to ask my pardon for all her injustice and unkindness, and I visited her daily for more than a week, when she expired, the victim of intemperance.* The new Master and Matron would gladly have welcomed me as a visitor, but the Chaplain, who was a very irregular visitor, and some of the farmers, so opposed *female interference* † that I found it best to resign my work, and now a new Chairman and a new Chaplain have been elected who would both, I know, equally oppose voluntary and lay ministrations, and decidedly close the door on

* Can any words speak more strongly of the need of a superior class of superintendents than such a fact as this ? If Guardians cannot ascertain the truth about the conduct of those they employ (which must have been the case here), one would think they might gladly avail themselves of the help of visitors who had opportunities of seeing things in their true light. Let them trust such visitors not to make *needless complaints*, but suppose them to be desirous to act for the good of all. The real state of things *cannot* be known by those who only visit as officials, and have no sympathy with the inmates. Fear of retribution from the nurses must effectually stop all mouths. Visitors at present dare not speak, whatever they may hear or see, for they are looked upon as spies, whose "interference" does harm.

† Such it will always be considered, unless there is co-operation between all who are connected with the work.

me. However, my visits were, I know, blest by God's Spirit, and as they were among the weakest and unworthiest, I look for an abundant blessing if the doors of Workhouses were no longer closed to lady visitors. I am quite certain that if the Poor-Law Board employed a Committee of Ladies to assist in arranging domestic affairs, a great saving would be effected, as well as much greater comfort prevail, for I have seen much higher prices given for provisions used in the House than we paid for our own consumption. Every public institution finds its wisdom in placing its domestic affairs under female surveillance, but here the Matron, often a very inexperienced woman, is alone left to guide a large establishment, and often to tyrannise over the weak and helpless. Amongst the good which I was able to effect, I may mention that I purchased a library with the grant from the Tract Society, adding a certain sum myself, for the use of the poor inmates, and it was acknowledged by the Guardians to have been really a useful gift. Why should any Union be without such a library?

“I went to the Workhouse with a real design of being useful, hoping to assist in the school and obtain situations for the young girls and women, for at that time the house was crowded with young female paupers, who were continually associating with women of lost and abandoned character. During the nine or ten months that I was per-

mitted to visit, I procured situations for five or six girls, and I also got two women, one aged forty, the other between fifty and sixty, into respectable situations, and I know that with God's blessing these recommendations were very satisfactory. The girls have I believe all, with one exception, turned out well, and the old woman is still in the same situation. The one aged forty, when I last heard of her, was a cook in a gentleman's family. They all had been years in the House.

“Of course as to the spiritual seed sown, we know but little. But one very abandoned woman, in whom I took great interest from her anxiety for her child who died while I visited the Workhouse, on her dying bed produced the books I had given her, — ‘The Sinners’ Friend,’ and ‘The Woman at the Well,’ and told the clergyman of the parish that they, coupled with the instruction she had received in her time of trouble, had led her to the Friend of sinners, and had induced her to give up her evil course, and for a year or more before her death she obtained her subsistence by working in the fields, leading a humble and respectable course. We may therefore hope that a tract, given with a kind word and tender sympathy, may be blessed.*

* The author of “Experiences of a Workhouse Visitor” writes to me that she has been lately called to the dying bed of one whom she used to visit in the Union two years ago, and whose case she considered hopeless. Here

“The Sabbath in a Workhouse I think most distressing to contemplate. One service performed at all hours, in this instance * at 9.30 in the morning, leaving a long and weary day of idleness and inactivity, which might be so profitably used if an adult Bible class was formed in the different wards, and regular teachers appointed, or kind friends to read to the aged.

“The inactive life led by boys in a Workhouse is much against their future progress in life. In agricultural districts it would be a good training for them if the Guardians could obtain a field to cultivate by spade husbandry, and it might supply the house with potatoes and other vegetables, and be able to pay the parish as well as a similar allotment rewards the poor man. It would give the boys active and regular daily employment in the open air, instead of making a string of cheerless looking children take a walk, from which they return little strengthened, and not at all exhilarated. The Union House might be made a school for usefulness, if properly managed; a training school for nurses, servants, and labourers, where the vicious might be reclaimed and the aged suc-

was a proof, however, that the seed sown then had not been in vain, and an acknowledgment of former influence which had seemed to be lost.

* In a large London Union it is at 9, before the cleaning is done for the day, and few can attend it; of course because the Chaplain has duty elsewhere.

coured and comforted. The guardians are willing to do the last, but they will not hear of turning the workhouse into a penitentiary; which is very shortsighted after all, as sin crowds its wards, and the present system but increases the widespread evil, which nothing but entire separation can remedy."

10.

The following testimony is from a county magistrate: "My own experience as Chairman of the Board of Guardians fully corroborates your statement. Often have I said that what Union Houses want is the countenance and support of the ladies who live near them. Men can do but little in a community of women, children, and a few old and sick of their own sex. But a sensible, well-educated, and religious-minded woman is a blessing to every class of society."

Though attention is now chiefly directed to the management of *Metropolitan Workhouses*, yet I cannot but think that much needs also to be done for those in the country, though in some respects the difficulties to be contended with appear to be much less. It was said by one speaker in the House of Commons that in the country every one knew about his neighbour, and there was not the same danger of harsh treatment as in London. Gentlemen may have more influence amongst the

Guardians; but, as a class, I suppose that farmers are not more easily worked upon than the tradesmen who act in this capacity in towns. A clergyman from a remote country village writes to me thus: "I sincerely trust the Workhouse inquiry may lead to something, for our country Workhouses are the very dread of the poor, which surely they ought not to be, at least to the aged and infirm. Our poor had rather starve on the veriest pittance outside. We have Guardians who have no regard for anything but to keep down the rate, who have no feeling for the poor of any sort."

DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

June 25. "Lord Raynham then rose to move that a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the condition and administration of Metropolitan Workhouses, and into the arrangements made and carried out by the parochial authorities of the metropolis for giving relief to the poor. He said he had been led to consider the condition of these Workhouses by circumstances which were as well known to most members of that House as to himself. He thought the mismanagement of the Metropolitan Workhouses a subject deserving the consideration of the House. Though the enormities

to which he intended to refer were matters of notoriety, he would nevertheless support his motion by instancing certain cases. Dr. Henry Bence Jones, who was appointed to inquire into the state of the Workhouse of St. Pancras, after entering into various matters of detail connected with the condition in which he found the Workhouse, went on to state that he could use no other term to describe what he had seen than the word 'horrible.' He had no doubt that the condition of that Workhouse had materially improved, but it would not be disputed that that improvement had been the result of inquiry, and he had no doubt that were inquiries made respecting other Workhouses, much good would ensue. It seemed that these Metropolitan Workhouses were mismanaged, not with respect to two or three matters only, but in regard to almost every circumstance connected with the administration of those establishments. The want of classification was universal throughout them, and the consequence was that decent persons, whom misfortune had reduced to take refuge in the Workhouse, were compelled to associate with some of the worst characters, whose conduct and language were offensive to them. The screwing down of salaries led to the officials being of a very unsatisfactory character. The great object was to get persons for little or nothing, in many respects it was nothing, and the result of this was that many of the officers were quite unfit

for the situations which they filled. In some cases the Guardians exercised a power which did not legally belong to them by giving orders to the Porter of the workhouse to refuse relief, while in others they did not enforce the test imposed by law of making every pauper who had a night's lodging and a breakfast perform four hours' work. Therefore they broke the law at both extremes. Another matter which required alteration was the system of employing paupers as nurses in the sick wards. He was informed that in the parish of St. Pancras this practice had been discontinued, but in other Workhouses it still prevailed. In most of these Workhouses, too, the wards were overcrowded, and no proper measures were taken for their ventilation. The result of this was the production of a great amount of disease and death. There are alterations required in the constitution of the Boards of Guardians. At present the only object looked to in the selection of Guardians was the reduction of expenditure, but it would be of great advantage if clergymen and other persons of respectable position in the district were made Guardians, as a matter of course. There ought, too, to be more efficient control over the officers of the Unions in the discharge of their duties. There had been several cases lately of suicides and deaths caused by the neglect of the medical officers."

Several speakers supported the motion, amongst whom Mr. Drummond alluded to the treatment of

pauper lunatics:—"In the rural districts country gentlemen tried to get them into proper asylums, because they knew that there the unfortunate creatures would be kindly and skilfully treated by persons who really devoted themselves to the care of such people. But in Workhouses there was no one who knew anything about such matters, and the result was that the poor lunatics were often most cruelly treated."

Mr. Alderman Copeland said "his experience, as a citizen of London and a magistrate, had long convinced him that here poverty was regarded as a crime and treated as a crime."

Sir J. Pakington said that "there could be no doubt that within the last five years circumstances had transpired to show that the administration of the Poor-Law in this great metropolis was not in a satisfactory state, and he must congratulate the noble lord on having found an opportunity of bringing forward a subject to which attention had been long directed, for in the course he had taken the noble lord had done a public service."

It was urged as an objection against carrying the motion, that there were between forty and fifty Workhouses in the metropolitan district, and if a Committee were appointed to investigate their management with any care, the inquiry would necessarily extend over two or three sessions, and on this account, therefore, the motion was postponed. It was supported by a petition signed by many in-

fluent persons, and every one to whom the subject was mentioned expressed great interest, and an earnest hope that good results would follow from bringing it forward.

THE PRISON AND THE WORKHOUSE.

The following extract from the Special Report of the Visiting Justices of the House of Correction, Westminster, for 1856, deserves the most serious attention.

During the last three years the number of persons committed to that Prison from Workhouses is as follows :—

			Males.			Females.
1854	-	-	18	-	-	142
1855	-	-	33	-	-	199
1856	-	-	67	-	-	273 *

“The attention of your Committee has for some time past been directed to the increased number of prisoners who have been committed for various offences to this Prison, from the metropolitan and rural Workhouses of this county... Many of the boys who enter the Prison from these asylums of

* In the Coldbath Fields Prison the total of these commitments in 1856 was 221. “Most of these persons had become liable to punishment for wilfully destroying their clothes whilst receiving temporary relief in the house.”

the poor have been repeatedly committed ; in many cases, indeed, their career has been an alternation from Workhouse to Prison, and from Prison to Workhouse ; this has frequently amounted to as many as eight or ten confinements in one or two years. In one day during the month of June last no less than six boys of 15 and 16 years of age were in this Prison from the same Workhouse, who had been committed for breaches of Workhouse discipline*, and in some instances for trivial offences, of whom one had been previously imprisoned ten times, two others eight, and one six. Again, in this Prison are found girls who have been from infancy inmates of Workhouses, who have become the most reckless and refractory characters within its walls, and that at the early age of 16 or 17, and who are seldom more than a few days absent. Your Committee cannot but believe, if more atten-

* A discipline which we are asked not to "interfere" with, by our offers of help. I have been told that "voluntary efforts would disturb the order and discipline of the house !" Might not some of these "trivial offences" have been checked or averted by judicious and kindly influence, without resorting to the prison punishment ? Whilst I write this, I see in the paper an account of three girls being taken before the magistrate for having broken windows in a London Union. They gave as an excuse that they were unkindly treated, and their hair had been shaved or closely cut off, which was the last act of exasperation. Their general conduct was not complained of. Two were committed to prison, if they could not pay for the damage done.

tion were paid, in Workhouses, to *classification and other important arrangements of a reformatory character*, there would be much less necessity for sending so many of the inmates to Prison ; and the Visiting Justices are strengthened in this belief from the fact of the very great difference in the numbers that are sent from some of the Workhouses in comparison with others." In the Report for 1857 there are the following remarks :—“ During the last year these committals have increased to a greater extent. Your Committee believe that an increase in the criminal population must arise from familiarising so many destitute persons with the interior of the Prison, and the experience of the past year fully confirms the view contained in the last Report on that important subject.”

In a paper entitled “ Suggestions proposed to be embodied in a Report to the Quarter Sessions, for the consideration of a Committee in relation to Criminal Jurisprudence,” the second proposition suggests that “ offences against Workhouse rules should be punished by other means than imprisonment in a criminal Prison ; and that greater facilities should be offered to the poor and destitute, as well as to discharged prisoners, to prevent their committing offences in order to obtain an asylum.” It is a well known fact that offences are committed, both in the streets and in Workhouses, with this object. One reason for this preference of the Prison to the Workhouse may perhaps be found in

the following tables, showing a comparison of the diet of the Pentonville Prison with that of a Country Union approved by the Poor Law Commissioners ; and it is said there are other dietaries in which the difference would be still more striking.

Allowance per Week.	Convicts.	Paupers.
Bread - -	140 oz.	105 oz.
Meat - -	28	10
Suet pudding	—	54
Cheese and butter	—	10
Vegetables -	112	54
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Solid food	280 oz.	233 oz.
Porridge or gruel	7 pints	10½ pints.
Soup -	3½	—
Cocoa - -	5¼	—
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Liquid food	15¾ pints	10½ pints.

This is but one amongst many instances which prove that at present there is more thought and more favour bestowed upon criminals in Prison than upon the poor in Workhouses.

SUGGESTIONS TO WORKHOUSE VISITORS.

As there is every probability that the plan of ladies visiting in Workhouses will be adopted in many cases, a few words of suggestion may not be unacceptable to those who may be endeavouring to organise any such plan. And first, I would earnestly ask them to remember that this is the beginning, the trial of a new experiment. Many are anxiously watching the result, some with eager hope of success, others with a desire to discover objections and causes of failure. Let no occasion for triumph be given to such persons; but, by a wise discretion, a careful avoidance of all that may clash with existing rules and authorities, by giving way in all minor arrangements to those with whom we may have to act, let us prove that the step has not been a rash one, but is rather the beginning of a long course of improvement. More will in the end be gained by a spirit of mutual accommodation and courtesy than by the most zealous and vigorous opposition. To maintain the respect and approval of those who are in authority is of the utmost importance; for this, it has always been said, is the difficulty of such a work, and the probable cause of its failure. Of the importance of selecting suitable persons for the work, I need hardly speak. In these days, when intercourse with the poor through district visiting has hap-

pily become general in almost every parish, I cannot think there will be a difficulty in finding suitable persons for this, in many respects, much less arduous duty. The fitness of course will not depend so much upon age, education, or position, as upon the individual character and an earnest but humble desire to work in any portion of our great Master's Vineyard; for the good effects of visiting may be chiefly expected to arise from sympathy, kindness, and simple Christian instruction.

The visitors should also be impressed with the importance of not saying or doing anything to offend the religious prejudices of the inmates; and they should have a mutual arrangement for the division of their work, one visitor not interfering with the work of another. Particular plans may be left to the discretion of each visitor, and many things will gradually suggest themselves to those who once begin such a work. One point there is which I believe visitors will find well worthy of their attention, viz. the possibility of introducing any light employment into the wards of sick or aged women, not able to do any of the regular work of the house, and who are now left wholly without occupation. A lady in the country has told me of the comfort and pleasure she bestowed by giving a little plain knitting to some of these poor utterly unemployed women, who, if they were in their own homes, certainly would not

sit the whole day idle. The idleness of course leads to gossip and quarrelling, as it would naturally do everywhere.

With regard to the inmates themselves, let us endeavour to see them as they really are, neither better nor worse than others of their class with whom we have to deal. Experience will teach us that in a Workhouse, as elsewhere, there is much good to be encouraged, much evil to be overcome, and then we shall not raise false expectations of success, or be disheartened by many failures and discouragements. To have made a beginning is a great gain, and we cannot doubt the good results that will follow, even amidst the difficulties that ever attend hitherto untried work. Success in a few instances will induce many to attempt it, however at present opposed to the introduction of a new principle into an old system and routine. A failure will inevitably retard the cause for a time, even though it may ultimately succeed. It *must* do so, if, as I believe, it is one branch of the work to which God has especially called us of this time and generation, one corner of the wide field, hitherto unoccupied, which He has reserved for us to cultivate. May the Spirit of Wisdom help us all to do our part in it, believing that it is His work, and if so it must prevail, whoever may oppose it!